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Op-Ed: The PSC Problem in Wisconsin

By Representative Barbara Dittrich (R-Oconomowoc)

Green Energy and global warming — Just take a cursory look around and you will see much chatter on these issues. With the demands for more “eco-friendly” energy production comes the growth and production of that energy around our state. Drive up the middle Wisconsin, and you will see tall wind turbines as far as the eye can see.

The 38th Assembly District will soon be home to two of Wisconsin’s largest solar farm projects. In Jefferson County, the Sinnissippi Solar Energy Center is in the planning phase. In Dane County, the Koshkonong Solar Project is planned to occupy over 2,000 acres of farmland with a goal of becoming operational by 2026. I have heard from many constituents on both sides of the issue. While there is substantial financial benefit to local communities and beleaguered farmers, the scale and side effects of such large projects is of great concern to others.

What I have found considerably frustrating as a legislator is the problem with Wisconsin’s Public Service Commission (PSC). This panel consists of unelected bureaucrats who serve at the behest of whomever is seated in the Governor’s Office. Legislators like myself have virtually no ability to address the valid concerns that constituents have regarding any given project.

As a result, when constituent questions are answered and referred to either their local officials or the PSC itself, they often find themselves getting nowhere. Lacking transparency, the PSC remains a nebulous mystery for citizens. They also feel unheard by the State, who seemingly dismisses any concerns in efforts to forge ahead with any policy the current governor espouses at the time. Meanwhile, legislators have proposed legislation, both last legislative session as well as this current one, authorizing community solar projects to address both the size and location of solar projects.

If green energy projects like these sprawling solar farms are an inevitability in Wisconsin, citizens’ concerns must be more sincerely considered and adaptations made moving forward. Things like stray voltage and the effect of energy costs to users in the area of the projects must be more clearly addressed. The PSC owes it to Wisconsinites to be more transparent in its process and approachability. Until that happens, our citizenry will be subject to the whims of these unelected bureaucrats.

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